

HELPING COURTS TO COLLECT DEBT

The *Enhanced Collections Project* originally grew out of a call by Chief Justice Ronald M. George, in his 2003 State of the Judiciary address, to make collection of money owed to the courts a top priority.

The passage of *Senate Bill 940* in 2004 led to the creation of the *Collaborative Court-County Working Group on Enhanced Collections*, which included trial court judges and officers, and representatives from the AOC, the Franchise Tax Board, the Department of Corrections, and the State Controller's Office.

The Judicial Council adopted the working group's recommendations in August 2004 aimed at establishing standards for debt collection; helping courts to prioritize, evaluate, and implement the collection of delinquent fees and fines; and, in some cases, reimbursing courts for the costs of collecting delinquent debts. In August 2006, the Judicial Council adopted standards for cost recovery and a revised collections reporting template.

The enhanced collections working group in fiscal year 2004–2005 achieved a 27 percent increase in collections over the previous fiscal year. In addition, courts, counties, and the California Compensation and Government Claims Board increased revenue by 64 percent through the Franchise Tax Board Court-Ordered Debt Collection Program during the same time period.

The working group was instrumental in developing and adopting the *Sentencing Fines and Fees Assistant (SFFA)*, a database program that gives judicial officers quick access to mandatory and discretionary fine, fee, and penalty data for selected infractions, misdemeanors, and felonies across multiple code sections. The SFFA streamlines the process for assessing fair and consistent fines and fees.

The AOC's Enhanced Collections Unit continues the working group's efforts. The unit has developed a link on the council's Serranus Web site as well as an external Web site to disseminate collections-related information and tools, and has to date assisted 25 courts in creating or improving their collection programs.

The Judicial Council also

- ▶ Disbursed \$3.59 million in Comprehensive Collection Program Awards, to help courts start or improve their collection programs
- ▶ Plans to expand collection efforts to other litigation areas including civil, family law, and juvenile courts
- ▶ Will collaborate with other state agencies to collect court-ordered payments

For more information, contact

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